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RUEHZP/AMEMBASSY PANAMA PRIORITY 0579
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SUBJECT: REPRESENTATIVE BLUNT MEETS WITH PRESIDENT URIBE

¶1. (SBU) Summary: President Uribe thanked Representative Blunt for his support, and outlined GOC efforts to protect union members, prosecute human rights violators, combat emerging new criminal groups, and address Colombia's socio-economic problems. Uribe explained that he had begun to review the files of paramilitary leaders participating in the peace process to determine if they continued to engage in criminal activity. If he found they had violated their peace process commitments, he would expel them from the process and extradite them to the United States. Representative Blunt recognized the importance of U.S. aid *as well as approval of the bilateral Free Trade Agreement* and said he was working to build support in Congress for Plan Colombia and the FTA. End Summary.

¶2. (U) Participants:

Representative Roy Blunt
Brian Diffell, Office of the Republican Whip
CDA Brian Nichols
POLCouns John Creamer

Colombian Participants:

President Alvaro Uribe
Ambassador Carolina Barco
Camilo Reyes, Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs (MRE)
Sandra Suarez, High Commissioner for Trade
Patricia Cortes, North American Principal Desk Officer (MRE)

¶3. (SBU) Representative Roy Blunt called on President Alvaro Uribe August 23. President Uribe said he had instructed GOC officials to keep the U.S. Congress informed of the latest developments on human rights, counternarcotics, and other key issues. Blunt said GOC's progress in strengthening Colombia's democratic institutions and creating democratic space impressed him. The U.S. valued Colombia's cooperation on security, intelligence, and counternarcotics. He recognized the importance of continued U.S. aid *as well as approval of the bilateral Free Trade Agreement (FTA)* and said he was working with Representative Hastert and other colleagues to build support for Plan Colombia and the FTA. A U.S. rejection of the FTA would adversely impact U.S. relations with Latin America for years to come.

¶4. (SBU) Uribe said he has reviewed the files of ten paramilitary leaders who appear to have engaged in ongoing criminal activities despite their participation in the demobilization and Justice and Peace law process. If he found they violated their commitments under the peace

process, he would revoke his suspension of their extradition requests and send them to the United States. Uribe noted the overall recidivism rate of the 33,000 demobilized paramilitaries was only 5%, but said this equaled over 1500 individuals. Many have joined new criminal groups. Uribe said the GOC is combating these new bands, and GOC security forces have killed or captured almost 1600.

¶ 15. (SBU) Uribe reviewed GOC progress in reducing violence against trade unionists, noting the murder rate against unionists is lower than the general homicide rate, but said the GOC's goal is to be able to say we have &zero8 cases. He said the Prosecutor General's Office has resolved 50 cases of violence against unionists *resulting in 90 convictions* and the GOC is protecting over 1500 unionists within the Justice and Interior Ministry's protection program. Despite tight budget constraints, the GOC has included funding in its 2008 for an additional 500 prosecutors and 1000 other professionals for the Prosecutor General's Office. This will strengthen the Prosecutor's capacity to resolve human rights cases as well as to implement the Justice and Peace Law.

¶ 16. (SBU) Uribe said many union members were victims of Colombia's history. In the 1960s and 1970s, the FARC and ELN made a conscious effort to penetrate the union movement, especially teachers, as part of their commitment to &all forms of struggle.⁸ When paramilitary groups emerged, they targeted unionists as alleged guerrilla collaborators. In the last two years, many murders of unionists stemmed from internecine conflict between the FARC and ELN in Arauca and other departments. As shown by the July verdict in the Drummond case in the United States, employers in Colombia were not killing workers to weaken unions.

¶ 17. (SBU) Blunt praised the GOC's efforts to combat narcotrafficking, noting the high cost paid in human lives. Uribe said the Colombian army and police lost 597 members in 2006, with 377 killed so far this year. Another 1700 are victims of mines who are undergoing rehabilitation in local hospitals.

¶ 18. (SBU) Uribe underscored the GOC's commitment to addressing Colombia's socio-economic problems, citing plans to expand the coverage of the GOC's main anti-poverty program *Families in Action* from 600,000 families to 1.5 million families. Under this program, families receive monthly stipends in exchange for ensuring their children receive basic health care and attend school. He would meet with local residents in Tumaco, a city on Colombia's troubled Pacific Coast, on August 25 to announce plans to enroll more residents in Families in Action and to relocate the local hospital from a tsunami zone to a safer location. Uribe said the GOC had appropriated \$25 million to upgrade the city's water supply, but lacked the funds to install a sewage system.

¶ 19. (U) Representative Roy Blunt has not cleared this message.
Nichols